

of colour imparted by the slight damp of the atmosphere. The Irish skies in the west have a peculiar radiance and intensity; they are swept clean, as it were, by the great sea-winds. The cloudy summer-skies of Italy are especially rich in electricity, and, therefore, magnificent in the grandeur of the cloud-forms; her *blue* skies are the despair of art, for no brush has ever succeeded, or ever can succeed, in combining their depth of colour with their intensity of light. Much blue, besides, is not to be trifled with, for no colour can offend so much if it be not chosen by the finest eye.

The subject of rustic models is suggestive of many a quaint reminiscence. The more primitive the peasant, the more suspicious he is of the mysterious

process of sketching; the lurking fear in many countries that the drawing—if it be a military one in which he figures—will be used against him for the purposes of the conscription, is a pathetic evidence of the one great horror of a peasant's heart. Even if he is willing to sit, some unwonted neatness in his dress, or some barbarous holiday-finery, turns all his picturesqueness into vulgarity, and self-consciousness destroys his grace. But there are some, particularly among the Italians, who seem to be too intelligent and too simple ever to lose dignity and freedom of movement.

Spring is calling the artists to their true studio—the open air. May they prosper on the pleasantest of errands!

Alice Oldcastle.



A FAMILY CHAT ON CHEESE.



NEVER buy the cheese, I leave that to my husband. He always says I can do a great many things, but I cannot choose cheese," said Mrs. Thompson one day, as together we turned from the importunate tradesman who was calling our attention to the respective merits of "prime Cheshire," and "first-rate American, quite

as good as Cheshire, and threepence or fourpence a pound cheaper."

"I suppose Mr. Thompson has a taste for a particular variety," said I.

"He has very good taste, far better than mine, I freely acknowledge," replied my friend. "He always looks for sharp and crumbly cheese, that bites your tongue when you take it." I try to get it as he likes it, but somehow I so often have failed and procured a supply of the mild, soapy sort, that he has at last taken that part of the marketing upon himself."

"I don't suppose you are very much to blame for that," said I; "it is not an easy thing to find the sharp crumbly cheese in ordinary shops. Perhaps Mr. Thompson buys it at some large establishment where there is plenty of choice."

"That is just it, he does so; and there he is able to get what he wants. I very much prefer the sharp kind, not only because it is more appetising, but because it is more economical. The mild kind is finished directly. The servants, unless closely watched, cut all the soft inner portion in huge wedges and leave the rind to get hard and dry; and when cut in that way there is a great deal of waste with cheese."

"There certainly is, unless the servants are either trustworthy or well looked after. But there are so many nice dishes that can be made of dried cheese grated, that there is no excuse for waste in that respect."

"Are there?" said Mrs. Thompson, looking very much interested. "I'm afraid I don't know them then. My only idea of avoiding waste has been to abstain from having fresh cheese till all the old was used, and the result of that has been that we have had to go without at intervals, and in the end I have been compelled to wink at the fact that the badly-cut rind was conveyed to the dust-bin."

"Ah! that is a pity. Cheese is really very nourishing, and I have good authority for saying that, for those who can digest it, it is twice as nourishing as cooked meat."

"I should like you to tell me, however, the dishes you make of cheese that is cut down near the rind."

"I will with pleasure, but I must first tell you that, as I make a point of using up every little bit of cheese, I also make a point of getting *good* cheese, good Cheshire or good American. For, you know, there are cheeses and cheeses. Then another point is, I don't let the cheese get *too* hard. It should be just so dry that it can be grated on an ordinary coarse grater, and when in this condition it can be used in ever so many ways; therefore care should be taken to use it at the right time."

"I see. Are you then an advocate for getting in a large piece of cheese at once?"

"If I lived in the country, and had a difficulty in getting good cheese, I should certainly buy a large piece when I had a favourable opportunity, and cut off a small quantity at a time for immediate use, putting the rest away in a cool cellar till we were ready for another slice. I dare say you know that it is a good

plan, in order to keep the cheese from becoming dry and flavourless, to spread a little butter over the cut surface, and to wrap the cheese in good brown paper, and keep it well covered. But for people who live in towns, and near good shops where cheese can be purchased at any time, I should think it best to buy it in small quantities, and to use one portion before getting any more."

"And that small portion you would keep covered?"

"Yes, and in a cool damp cellar, if there were one belonging to the house. If it became maggoty (though that would be unlikely with a small piece of cheese that was quickly used) a little spirit poured over the part would check the mischief. If what are called 'jumpers' appeared, I would have the cheese brushed or rubbed frequently, and keep it in a dry place for awhile."

"Oh! but real cheese-lovers demolish those jumpers with great gusto. I remember when I was a child seeing my grandfather, of whom I spoke before, crush the jumpers with the blade of his knife, and then put them on bread and eat that with relish, while we children watched him with interest that had a good deal of horror in it, and looked upon him as very much resembling a cannibal."

"A great many people prefer cheese in that condition, and we must remember that the fact that these little hoppers make their appearance in a cheese, is one sign of its goodness. For my own part, I should say the taste is an acquired one, and it is one with which I have no sympathy. I suppose it is a woman's prejudice, just as objecting to snails and frogs is an Englishman's prejudice."

"Very likely. But these cheese dishes?"

"The first one, the best known, the most easily made, is stewed cheese. You remember that in the well-known Welsh rarebit, fresh cheese is cut into slices, put upon buttered toast, and laid in a cheese-toaster till it is melted. But if this plan were followed with cheese that was beginning to get dry, it would not melt easily, and therefore cheese of this sort is better to be stewed. For this it should be cut into thin slices, and put into a saucepan with a little old ale, then stirred over the fire till it is melted. The saucepan should then be taken off the fire for half a minute, and supposing there is a quarter of a pound of cheese, the yolk of one egg beaten up with half a tea-spoonful of mustard and a little cayenne should be stirred into the mixture, first off the fire, and then on the fire for about two minutes. The preparation should then be turned upon a very hot dish, and served as hot as possible, little three-cornered pieces of dry toast being stuck into it here and there. If the cheese is not very rich a little butter may be put with it, and will help to soften it. I can assure you that very many people would highly appreciate cheese served in this way, but I am bound to tell you also that it is one of the most indigestible of dishes."

"I should quite imagine so," said Mrs. Thompson. "Pray tell me of something that can be more easily disposed of."

"There is macaroni cheese, always so much liked by gentlemen. For this, grate the cheese as you would

grate nutmeg, only on a coarser grater, and take two ounces, weighed after it is grated, with a little pepper and salt. Wash half a pound of Naples macaroni, break it up, throw it into boiling water with a lump of butter in it, and boil it till it is perfectly tender, but firm and not at all broken. It should be remembered that the commoner the macaroni, the more quickly it will be done. The best will take about half an hour to boil. When tender drain it dry; melt an ounce of butter in a stewpan, mix with it over the fire an ounce of flour to make a smooth paste. This paste should be made smooth with the back of a wooden spoon. Add half a pint of cold milk and stir the sauce till it boils. Season it with salt and pepper, and a pinch of cayenne if liked, or half a tea-spoonful of mustard may be mixed with it; add half the grated cheese and the macaroni drained dry. Turn it upon a hot dish, sprinkle the rest of the cheese over it, and brown the top in the front of the fire. Serve the preparation very hot. The best way to brown the top is to hold a red-hot salamander over it for a minute or two; that does the business both quickly and well; the only difficulty is that it is not every one who possesses a salamander; but an old iron fire-shovel will answer the same purpose, and most people have that. All that is necessary is to make it thoroughly hot and hold it over the macaroni, moving it about, so that the surface may be equally coloured. I can assure you that if it is nicely made the macaroni cheese is sure to find favour. But now I must tell you of another excellent dish to be made with grated cheese, and that is *choux-fleur au gratin*. It makes a capital dish for supper or luncheon, and is inexpensive. It can be made of a whole cauliflower or, if preferred, the sprigs only of one or two vegetables can be used."

"Which is the nicer, do you think?"

"When it is well managed the cauliflower kept whole looks the best. It is, however, rather difficult to keep it compact, and when it is straggling all over the dish it does not look very tidy. In order to avoid this, however, it is only necessary that the cook just before she pours the sauce over it should squeeze it together with a clean cloth held in both hands."

"I see. And how is the sauce made?"

"I am going to tell you. Procure a moderate-sized cauliflower, close and white. I need not say, be careful that there are no caterpillars in it. Cut the stalk quite close, and trim away the outer withered leaves. Put it head downwards into a large saucepan with plenty of fast-boiling water slightly salted, and let it boil until it is tender. It will take from a quarter of an hour to twenty minutes. If it turns over in the water, as it is very apt to do, it must be turned back again with a fork, for the flowers will be whiter if they are kept well under the water. Care must be taken, too, to remove any scum that rises. When the centre of the flower yields easily to pressure it is done."

"Then you take it up, I suppose?"

"Yes, take it up carefully with a slice and drain it on a sieve. But whilst it was boiling the sauce should have been prepared. You will need two ounces of

grated cheese, grated as for the macaroni, half an ounce of butter, an ounce of flour, a quarter of a pint of cold water, a table-spoonful of cream, and as much cayenne as would barely cover the flat surface of a split pea. Put the butter and the flour into a small stewpan and mix them thoroughly, off the fire, with the back of a wooden spoon. Add a quarter of a pint of cold water, and stir the sauce over the fire till it is thick and quite smooth; then add the cream, and the cayenne, and a pinch of salt. When the cauliflower is done enough take it up, cut off the outside green leaves, place it on the dish on which it is to be served, and squeeze it together, as I said before, with a cloth held in both hands. Stir half the cheese into the sauce, and then pour it gently all over the flower. Sprinkle the remainder of the cheese over the top and brown it as the macaroni was browned. Serve it very hot."

"That sounds as if it would taste good," said Mrs. Thompson.

"It is good. You understand that the proper thing for dishes of this description is grated Parmesan, but good English cheese grated will do very nearly as well."

"What other dishes can you tell me of, then?" said my friend.

"Ah! you are insatiable. And I am afraid our time is nearly exhausted. However, I must try to tell you of two very excellent preparations of cheese—viz., cheese-straws and croustades of cheese. They are, however, so delicate that I think for them we must allow a little Parmesan. Before I do so, however, let me say, you know that English cheese, and American cheese too for that matter, is frequently sent to table grated?"

"Yes, we serve it in that way, but we always have small pieces of cheese, neatly cut, handed round on the same dish."

"That is right. When attention is given to little things of that kind, the cheese course is quite an enjoyable part of the dinner. I often wonder that English people do not have a greater variety of cheese. Some of the foreign kinds, such as Roquefort, and Gruyère, and Camembert, and Gorgonzola, are delicious; and they are not really expensive, because they go so far. One or two different kinds of cheese, with celery or water-cress, pulled bread or biscuits, and sweet butter made into neat little pats, and garnished with parsley, form a very satisfactory conclusion to a good dinner. But now for my recipes.

"First the croustades. They may be made some day when cook has been making pastry, and has a few trimmings left. The pastry should be good, and should be rolled out very thin, after which small patty-pans or moulds should be lined with it. Grate two ounces of Parmesan into a basin, and mix with it an ounce of warmed (but not oiled) butter, the yolks of two and the white of one egg, a salt-spoonful of salt, and a pinch of cayenne. Cayenne should always be used with preparations of cheese. If the eggs are small three yolks will be required instead of two. Put a small spoonful of the mixture into the lined moulds, and bake the croustades in a moderately heated oven. When they are set and the pastry is lightly coloured they are done enough. Their appearance will be improved if a single sprig of fried parsley is put on the top of each, and grated cheese sprinkled over that.

"Now for the cheese-straws. Grate two ounces of Parmesan into a bowl. Mix with this a pinch of salt, a little cayenne, and two ounces of flour, and rub two ounces of butter into the mixture. Make the ingredients into a *stiff* paste with the yolk of one egg. Flour the pastry board and the rolling pin, and roll the pastry out rather thinly, till it is about half a quarter of an inch thick. As the straws are to be about five inches long, it will be well to roll the pastry to this width. Cut the pastry into fingers half a quarter of an inch wide; lift them carefully, one by one, upon a buttered baking sheet, and bake them in a hot oven. When they are a pale brown colour they are done enough; they will take about ten minutes. Sometimes small rings about the size of a penny-piece are cut out of the paste, and six or eight straws are put through each of these, in imitation of a bundle of sticks; or the straws are served piled on a dish in transverse rows. They are eaten cold. If put away in a tin, they will keep awhile."

"I must try these cheese-straws when I want to have something particularly good," said Mrs. Thompson. "And now, I suppose, you have come to the end of your list?"

"I have not come to the end of my list, but I have to the end of my time; therefore I must leave the cheese soufflé, cheese canapées, cheese crab, cheese d'Artois, crème de fromage, aigrettes de Parmesan, and other preparations of cheese for another time. Meantime I hope you will try one or two of the recipes that I have given you. I am sure you will find it worth while to do so."

PHILLIS BROWNE.

